

# You Should Drop the Camera and Pick up the Pencil

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Imagine that you love your family recipe of soup. The soup is well known by the community, and everyone seems to really enjoy it. It has just the right blend of everything. You've loved that soup ever since you were a child. Next thing you know, there is a new restaurant in town. They found out about your family's soup and want to make it as their own for their restaurant, so they tamper with the recipe to try to make it even better than the original recipe of soup. They add more garlic to the soup, assuming that is what the public wants, and they get rid of ingredients that they saw in the original recipe, not understanding how it was important to the soup as a whole. They decide to add some new ingredients here and there, but it's few and far between. It's completely ruined from the original recipe, but the people still show up to the restaurant to have the soup just because it reminds them of the amazing recipe of your family.

That is what live action remakes do to the original movies and shows.

A good example of this is the latest live action remake of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Yes, latest, this is its second live action remake, and it is considered to be the better of the two live action remakes. The first one is so infuriating that it won't be talked about in this essay. We'll be using *The Last Airbender* to illustrate why live action remakes often fail at understanding the successes of the original animated movies and shows, resulting in a product that is inferior to the original.

While live action remakes try to change the original to condense it and transform the original material, the live action remakes end up making plot holes that don't make sense in the context of the original show or movie. The show often ends up combining different episodes

together. In the episode titled “Spirited Away,” the face stealer spirit named Koh captures Aang’s friends, and because of this, Aang has to try to retrieve his friends. In the process, he realizes that avatar Roku stole something from Koh, so he has to go to avatar Roku to find out about what he has. In the original show, he’s got to avatar Roku by his pet dragon in the spirit realm. He is given visions about a comet coming, and that is the reason why avatar Roku wants to talk to him. The comet is a really big thing to know about. It is one of the driving forces of the show — and the live action version just leaves it out! You would think knowing that a comet is arriving soon that gives the Fire Nation lots of power is an important detail. Especially when the Fire Nation already destroyed the Air Nomads with the comet. Instead, the live action remake decides to focus on Koh, and avatar Roku doesn’t give Aang any information about the comet because they are too focused on Koh.

The comet is supposed to be one of the big driving forces of the show because this puts pressure on Aang to master all four elements quickly. Mastering all four elements is a big feat. In the original, Roku says it himself, “Mastering the elements takes years of discipline and practice, but if the world is to survive, you must do it by summer’s end” (“Winter Solstice: Part 2: Avatar Roku” 18:10). This is why they are rushing to find a water master in the northern water tribe. In the live action version, Aang gets a vision about how the northern water tribe is going to get attacked and goes there to protect the tribe instead of learning how to water bend. Aang doesn’t water bend at all during this season unless he is unconscious, and that doesn’t really count, does it? By leaving out the comet in the first season, the live action remake lacks focus in its story, and it creates problems for Aang learning water bending in future seasons.

Live action remakes often change the way that characters would behave in the originals, misrepresenting the characters. This is shown by the way the show *Avatar* represents Fire Lord

Ozai. He is supposed to be the most powerful character in the series, only defeatable by Aang the Avatar. He's a looming character and is supposed to be the big threat that they have to face at the end of the show. In the live action version, he is introduced in the third episode, and they even show his face. In the original show, his face isn't shown until the first episode of the third season because it keeps him more ominous. Another example of this character misrepresentation is that the live action remakes of *Avatar* seem to forget how powerful the Fire Lord is supposed to be. Zuko his son has a permanent scar on his face because of simply daring to speak up against a general that was underneath his father. When Zuko realizes he's going to have to fight his father he begs for mercy, but his father still chooses to hurt him. This shows how cruel his father is. In the live action version, they make Zuko fight back because they care more about the visual effects than the story itself. Zuko is even able to one up his father in this fight which shouldn't be even a possibility because his father is too strong. The live action series gets rid of the suspense of the Fire Lord, proving only that even a 15 to 16-year-old can defeat the tyrant.

Live action remakes often lack creativity and don't do as well as the original movies. In 2020, the creators of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* left the production of the 2024 live action remake. Michael Dante DiMartino made a Facebook post stating, "I realized I couldn't control the creative direction of the series, but I could control how I responded. So, I chose to leave the project" (DiMartino). This shows how live action remakes are put into this box, and it is difficult to be creative while creating these remakes. It is a balancing act between adding new material without creating plot holes and keeping the remake as a tribute to the original movie or show. It is a very thin line to walk, and most of the live action movies have seemed to fail at this because they are mainly worried about nostalgia and getting money from the remake.

The highest grossing live action remake that Disney has made is *The Lion King*. Its net earning was an estimated 543 million dollars (Franchise). *The Lion King* could even be considered as not a live action movie because it is mostly CGI. They didn't even attempt to make it somewhat live action, instead using CGI for everything. It got the most amount of profit, and it was one of the least transformative live action remakes because it wasn't even live action. They were banking off of nostalgia, and it worked. *The Lion King* proved to Disney and the movie industry as a whole that all they need to do is slap the label as a live action remake even if it is mostly CGI, and then they can watch the money roll in because of the nostalgia bait. They don't need to care about what the original story line was, why people loved the original story, because they have the power of nostalgia on their side, and it's a shame.

At this point in time, live action remakes cannot compare to the original shows and movies, but I hold hope for the future. Right now, the movie industry is going on a rampage of new live action movies, and maybe eventually they will figure out how to add new ideas to these older movies. Or maybe they will start coming up with new movies as a whole instead of resorting to live action remakes or sequels to rely on. Think of all the different stories that could be told, and all the ideas that haven't been explored. There's countless new things that they could write about. I hope that in the future new ideas are shared in the movie industry, and that we get new movies from those ideas instead of the same old ideas just on repeat being played over and over again. Who doesn't like trying a new flavor of soup?

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